DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 462 UD 029 418

AUTHOR	Benson, Peter L.; Roehlkepartain, Eugene C.
TITLE	Youth in Single-Parent Families: Risk and Resiliency. Background Paper.
INSTITUTION	Search Inst., Minneapolis, MN.
SPONS AGENCY	Lutheran Brotherhood, Minneapolis, MN.
PUB DATE	Jul 93
NOTE	25p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Search Institute, Thresher Square West, Suite 210, 700 South Third Street, Minneapolis, MN 55415.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adolescents; Behavior Patterns; *Disadvantaged Youth; Divorce; Elementary School Students; Elementary Secondary Education; Family Characteristics; Family Influence; Family Problems; *Family Structure; *High Risk Students; Nuclear Family; *One Parent Family; Secondary School Students; Urban Youth
IDENTIFIERS	*Resilience (Personality)

ABSTRACT

To gain perspective on how the structure of a family impacts young people, data from a national study conducted by the Search Institute were reexamined. Of the 47,000 students of the study, 8,266 live in a single parent household, due largely to divorce. Analysis focused on at-risk behavior, deficits, and the dynamics of healthy single-parent families that help them beat the odds. The issues are too complex, and the perspectives and values too diverse to settle in a single discussion, but it appears that categorical statements about two-parent families being good and single-parent families being bad overstate the case. Two-parent families have an edge, but being in one is no guarantee that a young person will have the nurture, control, and guidance needed to grow up healthy. Being a single parent is tough, and living in such a family structure is not ideal for children, but with special effort and with the support of institutions, communities, and individuals around them, single-parent families can be supportive and healthy families in which young people can thrive. Six figures provide details of the situations of single families. (SLD)

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BACKGROUND PAPER

ED360462

YOUTH IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

RISK AND RESILIENCY

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July 1993

Search INSTITUTE

Practical research benefiting children and youth

DR. PETER L. BENSON AND EUGENE C. ROEHLKEPARTAIN

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This report builds on an earlier Search Institute report titled *The Troubled Journey: A Portrait of 6th-12th Grade Youth*, by Dr. Peter L. Benson. Research for this report was supported by RespecTeen, a program of Lutheran Brotherhood, a fraternal benefit society. RespecTeen is a nationwide effort aimed at helping parents, adolescents, schools, youth-serving agencies, congregations, and communities work together in promoting positive youth development.

Youth in Single-Parent Families:
Risk and Resiliency

By Peter L. Benson, Ph.D., and
Eugene C. Roehlkepartain

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700 South Third Street, Suite 210
Minneapolis, MN 55415
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(800) 888-7828

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INTRODUCTION

First, the facts: Family structure is not what it used to be. In the 20 years after World War II, the vast majority of children grew up in families with two biological parents. But then two significant trends began. One was a dramatic increase in out-of-wedlock births. The second was a dramatic rise in divorce. The combination of these two trends contributes to a remarkable phenomenon: One out of four children in the United States (25 percent) currently live in single-parent families. Perhaps even more significant, about 60 percent of children born now will live in a single-parent family before they turn 18. For 85 percent of these single-parent children, this means living with a mother. Only sporadically, if at all, do most of these children benefit from a relationship with their father. (See Figure 1.)

About 60 percent of children born now will live in a single-parent family before they turn 18.

These current realities reflect dramatic growth in the past decade. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of families headed by single-parent mothers increased by 25 percent between 1980 and 1991. The number of single-parent families headed by fathers (a much smaller portion of the overall single-parent family structure) saw a 92 percent increase during the same years.[1]

There are two prevailing views of this growth in the number of single-parent families. One view (which may be the dominant public image) sees single-parent families as inevitable and tends to cast them in a sympathetic, if not favorable, light. From this viewpoint, single-parent families are a courageous, desirable alternative to unhappy two-parent families, and they deserve social acceptance as a legitimate family form. But a second image also has support: The single-parent family is a deficient family structure that, with its proliferation, weakens the social fabric.

This second view of single parenthood rarely hits mass public consciousness. But in April 1993, *The Atlantic Monthly* published an article by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead titled "Dan Quayle Was Right," which has created a flurry of interest. What makes this event so interesting is that this conservative-appealing title appeared in a politically liberal magazine.

The article's thesis is that "the dissolution of two-parent families is harmful to large numbers of children." It's time, the author argues, to end the quiet tolerance of family breakup because it's what adults want for themselves and get down to the business of preserving two-parent families for the sake of children. When Dan Quayle attacked Murphy Brown, he hit a nerve. And though considered by many politically

incorrect and even harmful, Quayle's attack resurfaced an issue we have been afraid to discuss for fear both of offending single-parent families and of casting aspersions on single parents that smack of blaming the victim.[2]

The two views of single-parent families have now been brought into the open, and the debate has become polarized. In its extreme expressions, one side seeks to support single-parent families, and the other wants to prevent them from happening at all. It is, at this point, an either-or, good-bad debate.

What matters most—regardless of family structure—is what happens within the family.

The truth, of course, lies somewhere in the middle. On the average, kids fare better in two-parent families. The key phrase is "on the average." But there is a sizable percentage of children in single-parent families who thrive and many in two-parent families who do not. Family structure, then, does not, in and of itself, explain child and adolescent well-being. What matters most—regardless of family structure—is what happens within the family.

To gain a perspective on how family structure impacts young people, we re-examined data from Search Institute's national study titled The *Troubled Journey: A Portrait of 6th-12th Grade Youth*. Out of the 47,000 students in the study, 8,266 live in a single-parent family due to divorce or separation, and 31,749 live in two-parent intact families.[3] (See Figure 2.)

The analysis to follow focuses on three issues: at-risk behavior, deficits, and the dynamics of healthy single-parent families that can help them beat the odds. In the process, we hope to shed light on both the risks faced by youth in single-parent families and the factors in families, communities, and organizations that can reduce those risks.

FAMILY STRUCTURE AND AT-RISK BEHAVIOR

Youth in single-parent families are, on the average, clearly more at risk than those in two-parent families (see Figure 3). Areas of greater risk for single-parent youth include alcohol use, tobacco use, depression, suicide, anti-social behavior, and sexual activity. On the average, youth in single-parent families are involved in 3.96 of the 20 at-risk behaviors measured, compared to 2.65 at-risk behaviors among youth in two-parent families. This increased risk level in single-parent families holds true for both boys and girls, and for younger youth (grades 6-8) and older youth (grades 9-12).

On average, youth in single-parent families are involved in 3.96 at-risk behaviors, compared to 2.65 among two-parent youth.

One example of at-risk behavior is daily cigarette use. This behavior typifies 5 percent of younger youth living in two-parent families, and jumps to 11 percent of those living with one parent. Among older youth, the jump is from 12 percent in two-parent families to 21 percent in one-parent families.

Another dramatic increase can be seen in the area of sexual activity. The percent of youth who have experienced intercourse *two* or more times rises from 8 percent (two-parent families) to 20 percent (one-parent families) for grades 6-8. For grades 9-12, it rises from 35 percent to 53 percent.

These numbers represent a consistent pattern, as shown in Figure 3. On many ways of defining at-riskness, single-parent youth tend to show more health-compromising behavior than do youth in two-parent families.

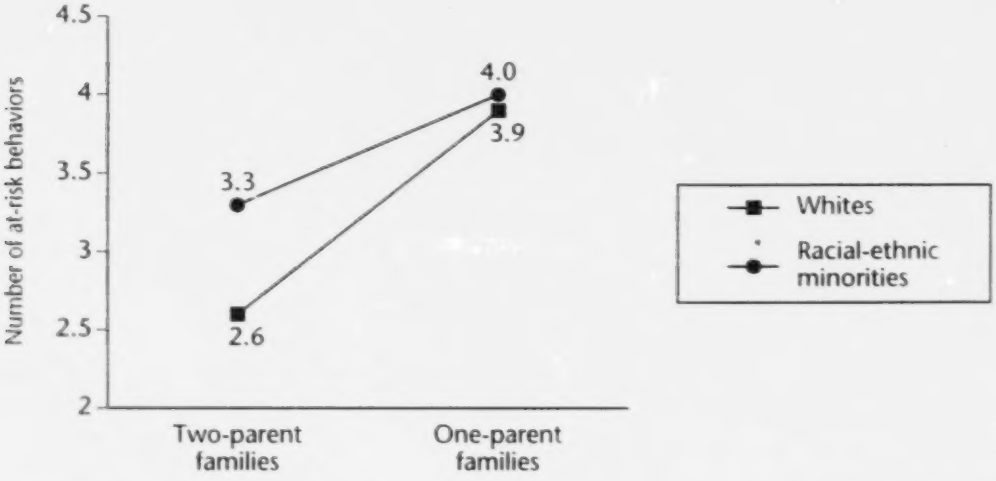
But caution is in order. Is this difference due to differences in family structure, or is it due to the demographics of families? Here we must reckon with family income and race. Single-parent families have, on the average, considerably lower incomes than two-parent families. And a higher percentage of single-parent families are racial-ethnic minorities than is the case with two-parent families.

To look deeper into this matter, we statistically controlled the factors of race and levels of maternal education, which is a reasonable proxy for family income. When these two factors are held constant, we still find a strong effect for family structure. This means that the at-risk differences between youth in single- and two-parent families persist even after race and maternal differences are taken into account.[4]

Overall, the at-risk difference between one- and two-parent youth holds across many demographic categories. Whether we are looking at boys or girls, younger or

older youth, whites or racial-ethnic minorities, and mothers who dropped out of high school or who have less than a college degree, youth in one-parent families tend to engage in risk-taking behaviors with greater frequency than do youth in two-parent families.

One interesting and unexpected finding emerged. The impact of having a single parent appears to be more negative for white youth than for youth of color, as shown in this chart:[5]



For all its perceived benefits for adults, family breakup appears, on the whole, clearly to have a negative impact on the children.

This pattern shows that the increase in at-risk behavior between two-parent and one-parent families is more pronounced with white youth. Why this occurs deserves further research and discussion. Could it be, for example, that White families tend not to have as strong a social and extended-family network that can support single parents? Or does being a single-parent carry more stigma and isolation in White communities? Other explanations may be plausible as well.

These findings join a growing and convincing body of research that points to the risks to children associated with our nation's unusually high divorce and separation rates. And while many observers focus attention on the immediate impact of divorce on children, the long-term impact may be just as significant. For example, a Wilder Research Center study found that "compared to their counterparts from traditional two parent families, young adults raised by single parents (primarily single mothers) tend to have lower educational, occupational and economic attainment. Differences between the two groups are also observed in family formation and marital stability." These differences held true even when researchers controlled for economic disadvantage.[6]

In short, for all its perceived benefits for adults, family breakup appears, on the whole, to have a clearly negative impact on the children. As Barbara DaFoe Whitehead concludes, "Though far from a perfect social institution, the intact family offers children greater security and better outcomes than its fast-growing alternatives: single-parent and stepparent families."[7]

DEFICITS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO AT-RISK LEVELS

What is it about single-parent families that increases the risks for young people? The causes are complex, and many cannot be ascertained through a survey of youth. However, consistent with other research, one of the differences we observed involves the levels of deficits in single-parent families. Deficits are liabilities that can block or inhibit positive development or can lead the way into negative behaviors. These deficits include victimization, poverty, negative social influence, isolation, and parental addiction.

Of 10 deficits measured in *The Troubled Journey*, the average single-parent youth experiences 2.9 deficits, compared to 2.1 deficits for the two-parent youth. Six deficits are particularly more common in single-parent families, as shown in Figure 4. Some of these deficits may reflect the realities that many single-parent families face. Physical abuse, sexual abuse, or parental addiction may have been factors in the divorce or separation that created the single-parent family. Each can be a source of conflict and stress within the family that makes it difficult for young people to find support, love, and care within the family. These same factors can also detract the parent's attention from the young person—not to mention ability to parent effectively.

The realities faced by many youth in single-parent families can become gateways into risky choices.

The other deficits (time alone, stress, television overexposure) may also be exacerbated by the stress and economic realities of single parenting. For example, with one parent responsible for everything—earning an income, maintaining the household, etc.—she or he simply may not be able to be at home as much as would be desirable. And television is an entertainment source more readily available to limited-income households.

It is important to note that this particular study did not seek to assess students' exposure to poverty—a deficit that may underlie many of the others. Clearly, a preponderance of research has shown the widespread reality and negative impact of poverty among single-parent families.

In short, the realities faced by many youth in single-parent families can become gateways into risky choices. The challenge becomes to find ways to circumvent these deficits or, at least, to offset them with positive assets—both within the families and in the communities around them.

ASSETS: WHY SOME SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES THRIVE

As bad as this picture may look for single-parent families, we must remember that at-risk and deficit differences refer to "on the average." Yes, on the average, one-parent youth have more problems. But we err if we generalize to all single-parent families. Almost half of younger youth in single-parent families are at low risk (none or one at-risk behavior) as are one-fourth of older youth. And youth in some two-parent families are at high risk. Here are the percentages of youth who are at low (0-1 at-risk behaviors), moderate (2-4), and high (5 or more) risk in single-parent and two-parent families:

While the odds favor youth in two-parent families, fate is not sealed based solely on family structure.

		Low Risk	Moderate Risk	High Risk
Grades 6-8	One parent	46%	33%	21%
	Two parents	65%	26%	9%
Grades 9-12	One parent	26%	31%	43%
	Two parents	41%	31%	28%

Thus, while youth in single-parent families are more likely to be at risk, it is not inevitable that they will be. While the odds favor youth in two-parent families, fate is not sealed based solely on family structure. The challenge, then, is to discover what is happening in single-parent families where youth thrive.

Part of the answer lies in developmental assets. In this national study, we looked at 30 assets—developmental building blocks—each of which promotes health and serves as a protective factor for all young people, including those in single-parent families. Overall, two-parent youth tend to have more of these assets in their lives (16.9, on average) than one-parent youth (15.2, on average). (See Figure 5.)

Examining the specific assets in Figure 5 shows interesting patterns. On many assets, differences between average single- and two-parent youth are relatively small. Others, however, show greater differences. For example, single-parent youth are much less likely than two-parent youth to report having a family life that provides love and support (54 percent and 70 percent, respectively, for grades 6-8; 44 percent and 55 percent, respectively, for grades 9-12). Whether the lack of caring is a result of the family conflict, or of a parent's preoccupation with personal concerns, or some other family dynamic is an important question worthy of further research.

Another important area of difference deals with involvement in various structured

activities. In all categories (music, school extracurricular, community organizations, and religious involvement), young people in single-parent families are much less likely than two-parent youth to report involvement. Since these activities often demand financial and time commitments from parents, they may be less accessible to single-parent families. Or another possible factor may be that single-parent youth feel out of place in some of these settings (because of an enduring stigma on single-parent families or because the sponsoring organizations presume two-parent families in their planning). Whatever the reason, the result is that many single-parent youth miss important opportunities for positive structure.

The overall difference in asset levels may be a direct impact of the divorce in that divorce weakens the bond between parent and child. In *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade After Divorce,* Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee write:

> In most crisis situations, such as an earthquake, flood, or fire, parents instinctively reach out and grab hold of their children, bringing them to safety first. In the crisis of divorce, however, mothers and fathers put children on hold, attending to adult problems first. Divorce is associated with a diminished capacity to parent in almost all dimensions—discipline, playtime, physical care, and emotional support. Divorcing parents spend less time with their children and are less sensitive to their children's needs.[8]

Many of the differences in assets between single-parent youth who thrive and those who do not point toward the support systems around families.

Beneath the overall differences between single- and two-parent families, however, lies the important news that some single-parent families find a way to provide many of these assets. Figure 6 shows 20 assets that most discriminate between single-parent youth who thrive (none or one at-risk behavior) and those who have problems with growing up (five or more at-risk behaviors). In all of these areas, single-parent youth who thrive are more likely to experience these assets in their lives. In five areas (positive school climate, positive peer influence, educational aspiration, homework, valuing sexual restraint), youth who thrive are more than twice as likely as those who don't to have these assets in their lives.

Several assets underscore the influence of family dynamics on adolescent well-being. Youth who thrive in single-parent families are almost twice as likely as those who do not to report feeling support from their family, turning to a parent for social support, having a parent involved in schooling, and having explicit parental standards.

All of these factors are ones that, previous research suggests, tend to be lacking in families after divorce. Wallerstein and Blakeslee write that "divorce is an acute, painful, long-remembered experience that children must often negotiate with a sense that they are alone in the world." Their supports seem to fall away and they often have no one with whom to talk about the experience. The researchers found that only 10 percent of children had any adult speak to them sympathetically through the divorce process.[9]

It is also interesting to note that many of the differences in assets between single-parent youth who thrive and those who do not point toward the support systems around families: supportive, quality schools; friends who are a positive influence; involvement in extracurricular activities; involvement in religious institutions. It may be that this external network of support is key to success in single-parenting. And it certainly suggests that communities and institutions that serve families and youth can have a positive impact on the health of these families.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: NURTURING HEALTHY FAMILIES

If we could wave a magic wand, we would guarantee that every child had two responsible, caring, and committed parents. But given that this won't happen, our challenge is to discover ways to maximize the number of strong, two-parent families and to support all family efforts to raise healthy children, including those efforts by single-parent families. Several themes suggest directions for action.

REDUCE DIVORCE AND SEPARATION RATES—Divorce and separation rates in the United States are considerably higher than in other industrialized countries. For the sake of our young people, we must begin reversing this trend and lower the divorce rate. Greater attention must be paid to providing the support and incentive to families to resolve conflicts and stay together when feasible. Marriage and parent education can play a role. Welfare policies that unintentionally discourage marriage must be re-examined.

Greater attention must be paid to providing the support and incentive to families to resolve conflicts and stay together when feasible.

Perhaps even more important, though, we must begin shifting our national consciousness to recognize that divorce and separation can have long-term consequences for children that we may have previously ignored. "In the face of the evidence," argues Whitehead, "it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain the proposition that all family structures produce equally good outcomes for children."[10] Those of us committed to the welfare of children and youth have an opportunity to take the lead in shaping this new public awareness for needed changes.

MOBILIZE ASSETS FOR SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES—Though reductions in the divorce and separation rates are possible in the long run, we must also recognize that there will still be many single-parent families. The assets that we see in thriving single-parent families suggest some important places where communities, schools, religious institutions, and others can be of particular help. By nurturing these kinds of assets, we can help to counterbalance some of the difficulties that youth in single-parent families tend to encounter.

Unfortunately, the issues that face children experiencing divorce and separation can often be taboo subjects in some settings—even though divorce is a widespread phenomenon. Schools, congregations, and community organizations could offer valuable support to children facing divorce by providing caring adults and positive peer environments in which to share feelings and gain support. Mentoring and peer helping programs are among the structures that can have a positive impact.

Another key to mobilizing assets is to support, teach, and nurture single mothers so that they can be healthy parents. As we noted, many of the assets that help youth in single-parent families thrive involve family dynamics and parenting style. "The quality of a mother-child relationship is the single most critical factor in determining how children feel about themselves in the postdivorce decade and how well they function in the various domains in their lives," write Wallerstein and Blakeslee. They continue:

> When the mother is psychologically stable and can maintain closeness and separation simultaneously, this relationship is very helpful to the child's development. When the mother is in poor shape, depressed or preoccupied, the same closeness can intrude on the child's development and cripple the child's capacity to move forward.[11]

PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD—Because mothers continue to bear primary responsibility for (and brunt of) parenting, we must adjust societal expectations and norms so that fathers (married and unmarried) take responsibility for their children. If family disruption occurs, fathers need to be held accountable (legally and through social expectations) for economic, social, and psychological support of their children.

Part of the problem is that societal norms generally do not expect fathers to be actively involved in raising their children.

Once again, part of the problem is that societal norms generally do not expect fathers to be actively involved in raising their children. "Man lives in a world that does not tell him that a good man, irrespective of his circumstance, does not ignore his obligation to his child," David Blankenhorn, director of the Institute for American Values explained to the *Minneapolis StarTribune*. "And so he doesn't have a cultural idea in his head about what it means to be a father."[12]

The good news is that this may be changing as more and more fathers assume nurturing roles in the family. "Only recently has society permitted and encouraged men to express their feelings for and strong attachment to their children," Wallerstein and Blakeslee note. "Now, instead of running away, more fathers than ever are experiencing the full range of the dilemma and facing the same internal conflicts as women."[13]

ADDRESS THE ECONOMIC ISSUES—It is important to recognize a critical obstacle in the way of most single-parent families: poverty. Half of all single mothers live below the poverty line, versus one out of 10 two-parent families. A partial solution is to strengthen regulations mandating child support by fathers. Other ways to address the economic needs include:

- making it feasible for single parents to attend college or receive vocational training
- providing social services that promote and support economic viability and independence
- ensuring that businesses have family-friendly schedules and policies
- advocating for equal pay for women
- providing affordable, quality preschool and after-school care

MAKE CHILDREN A PRIORITY—Many parents who go through divorce agonize over the impact on their children. But, if Whitehead and others are correct, one of

the underlying issues in the negative impact of divorce is that many adults make choices based solely on their own need for happiness, hoping that the benefit will "trickle down" to children.

However, that has not happened. "Adults have benefited from the changes in family life in important ways," Whitehead writes, "but the same cannot be said for children. Indeed, this is the first generation in the nation's history to do worse psychologically, socially, and economically than its parents."[14] While it is clearly misleading to attribute all the change to changes in family structure, the underlying principle remains: As a society, we rarely make choices based on the best interest of children. By recovering our sense of responsibility for the well-being of children as a central communal value, we can expect to see less family disruption combined with broader support for children when divorce does occur.

With special effort—and with the support of individuals, communities, and institutions around them—single-parent families can be supportive, healthy families in which young people will thrive.

CONCLUSION

These data and implications do not represent the final word on single-parent families. Other researchers have explored the issues in great detail (see Selected Resources, page 13). The issues are too complex and the perspectives and values too diverse to settle in a single discussion.

But these new analyses remind us that categorical statements about two-parent families being good and single-parent families being bad overstate the case. True, two-parent families have the edge. Yet, being in a two-parent family is no guarantee that a young person will have the nurture, control, and guidance needed to grow up healthy. Many two-parent families lack the same positive dynamics that have been highlighted in this report.

At the same time, being a single parent is tough work, and living in such a family structure is not optimal for children. But with special effort—and with the support of individuals, communities, and institutions around them—single-parent families can be supportive, healthy families in which young people will thrive.

SELECTED RESOURCES ON SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

"Dan Quayle Was Right," by Barbara DaFoe Whitehead. *The Atlantic Monthly,* April 1993, pp. 47-84.

Second Chances: Men, Women, & Children a Decade After Divorce, by Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989).

Single Mothers and Their Children: A New American Dilemma, by Irwin Garfinkel and Sara S. McLanahan (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press, 1986).

"Special Issue: The Single Parent Family," *Family Relations* (January 1986).

Statistical Handbook on the American Family, by Bruce A. Chadwick and Tim B. Heaton (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1992).

Surviving the Breakup: How Children and Parents Cope with Divorce, by Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan B. Kelly (New York: Basic Books, 1980).

SINGLE-PARENT ORGANIZATIONS

Committee for Single Adoptive Parents, Box 15084, Chevy Chase, MD 20825; (202) 966-6367. Provides information and support for single adoptive parents. Publishes *The Handbook for Single Adoptive Parents.*

National Organization of Single Mothers, Box 68, Midland, NC 28107; (704) 888-5437. Establishes support and self-help groups nationwide and publishes a newsletter for single mothers.

Parents Without Partners, 8807 Colesville Road, Silver Spring, MD 20910; (301) 588-9354. Has chapters around the world that sponsor educational activities, family activities, and parent social/recreational activities.

Single Parent Resource Center, 1165 Broadway, New York, NY 10001; (212) 947-0221. Provides training, workshops, and resources related to single parenting for parents, professionals, and support groups.

Single Parents With Adopted Kids, 4108 Washington Road, #101, Kenosha, WI 53144; (414) 654-0629. A national support group with a newsletter for single adoptive parents and prospective single adoptive parents.

ENDNOTES

[1]Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1992* (112th Edition) (Washington, DC, 1992), p. 55.

[2]Barbara DaFoe Whitehead, "Dan Quayle Was Right," *The Atlantic Monthly* (April 1993), pp. 47-84.

[3]The remaining 7,000 youth in the sample live in other family configurations (e.g., death of a parent, blended families, living without a parent, etc.).

[4]In a multivariate analysis of variance, F for family structure is 160.77 ($p < .0001$) after the effects for grade, race, gender, and maternal employment were extracted.

[5]There is a significant interaction between race and family structure: F race x family structure = 12.19, $p < .0005$.

[6]Daniel P. Mueller and Philip W. Cooper, "Children of Single Parent Families: How They Fare as Young Adults," *Family Relations* (January 1986), pp. 169-175.

[7]Whitehead, p. 80.

[8]Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade After Divorce* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), p. 7.

[9]Wallerstein and Blakeslee, p. 13.

[10]Whitehead, p. 80.

[11]Wallerstein and Blakeslee, p. 187.

[12]Steve Berg, "Valuing the Family: A Perspective," *Minneapolis StarTribune* (June 6, 1993), p. 10A.

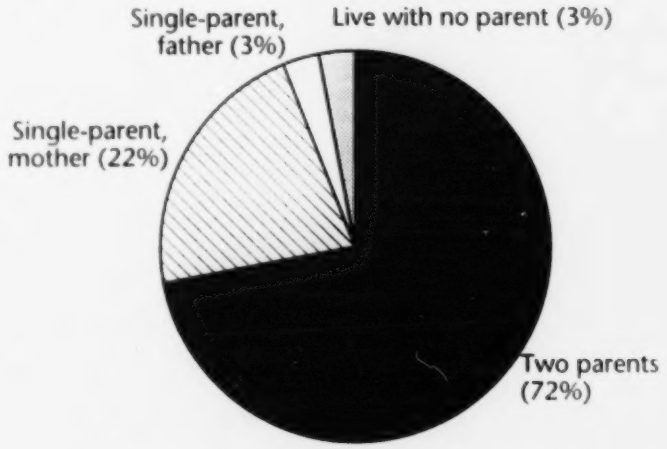
[13]Wallerstein and Blakeslee, p. 187.

[14]Whitehead, p. 84.

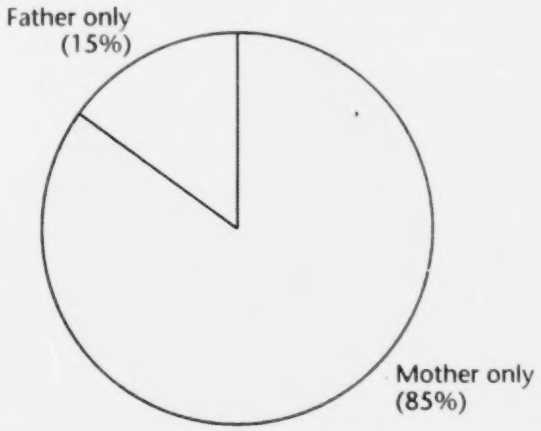
■ FIGURE 1

FAMILY STRUCTURE IN THE UNITED STATES

According to 1991 figures from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, here is the breakdown of types of family structures for all families that include children under age 18:



Here is a breakdown of the types of single-parent families in the United States:

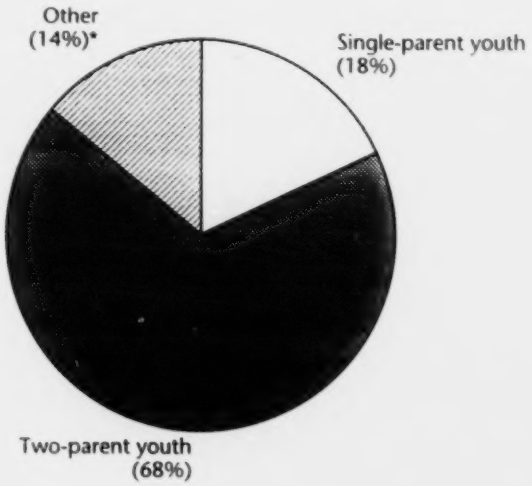


SOURCE: Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1992* (112th Edition), Washington, DC, 1992, p. 55.

■ FIGURE 2
FAMILY STRUCTURE IN THE TROUBLED JOURNEY

Total number of 6th-12th graders in the sample	46,799
Total number of youth in single-parent families due to separation or divorce	8,266
Total number of youth in two-parent, intact families	31,749
Total number of youth in other family structures (blended family, death of a parent, living without a parent, etc.)	6,784

Percentage breakdown of youth in *The Troubled Journey:*



*Other includes blended families, death of a parent, living without parents.

For more detailed information on sample characteristics, see Peter L. Benson, *The Troubled Journey: A Portrait of 6th-12th Grade Youth* (Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute, 1990).

■ FIGURE 3

YOUTH IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES: MORE AT RISK

Here are the percentages of youth in grades 6-8 and grades 9-12 who are involved in each behavior.

At-Risk Behaviors	Definition	Grades 6-8		Grades 9-12	
		One Parent	Two Parents	One Parent	Two Parents
Frequent alcohol use	Has used alcohol six or more times "in the last 30 days."	5.4%	2.9%	16.9%	12.7%
Binge drinking	Has had five or more drinks in a row, once or more "in the last two weeks."	17.3%	10.5%	33.9%	26.9%
Daily cigarette use	Smokes one or more cigarettes daily.	11.4%	4.7%	21.2%	12.0%
Chewing tobacco use	Has used chewing tobacco 20 or more times "in the last 12 months."	2.5%	1.9%	6.0%	6.1%
Illicit drug use	Has used marijuana, cocaine or crack, heroin or other narcotics six or more times "in the last 12 months."	5.8%	2.1%	17.4%	8.4%
Sexually active	Has had intercourse two or more times.	19.9%	8.4%	52.9%	34.5%
Contraceptive non-use	Is sexually active, and self or partner does not always use contraceptives.	17.2%	7.8%	32.9%	20.6%
Depression	Is sad or depressed "most of the time" or "all of the time."	17.9%	10.4%	22.1%	14.1%
Suicide	Has attempted suicide once or more.	16.7%	7.8%	18.9%	12.1%
Vandalism	Destroyed property "just for fun" two or more times "in the last 12 months."	11.3%	6.2%	13.1%	9.7%
Group fighting	Took part in a fight between two groups or gangs, two or more times "in the last 12 months."	17.4%	12.7%	14.9%	10.5%
Police trouble	Got into trouble with the police, two or more times "in the last 12 months."	7.7%	3.6%	11.0%	7.5%
Theft	Stole something from a store, two or more times "in the last 12 months."	11.0%	6.4%	14.1%	10.4%
Weapon use	Used a knife, gun, or other weapon "to get something from another person," two or more times "in the last 12 months."	2.9%	1.4%	2.4%	1.4%
School absenteeism	Skipped school two or more days "in the last month."	10.2%	5.1%	16.9%	9.0%
Desire to drop out	Wants to quit school before completing high school.	2.3%	1.2%	1.8%	0.6%
Driving and drinking	Has driven after drinking, two or more times "in the last year."	3.5%	1.3%	17.7%	15.9%
Riding with a drunk driver	Has ridden with a driver who had been drinking, two or more times "in the last year."	32.1%	19.6%	44.2%	35.6%
Seat belt non-use	Does not use seat belts "all" or "most" of the time.	51.4%	43.3%	56.3%	50.9%
Bulimia	Vomits on purpose after eating, once a week or more.	1.9%	0.9%	2.3%	1.5%

■ FIGURE 4

DEFICITS OF YOUTH IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

This chart shows the percentages of youth in grades 6-8 and 9-12 who report each deficit. (Poverty was not measured in this study.)

Deficit	Definition	Grades 6-8		Grades 9-12	
		One Parent	Two Parents	One Parent	Two Parents
Alone at home	Student spends two or more hours per day at home without an adult.	62.1%	53.3%	69.3%	56.3%
Hedonistic values	Student places high importance on self-serving values.	48.8%	47.7%	48.8%	48.0%
TV overexposure	Student watches television three hours or more per day.	54.9%	46.4%	42.2%	34.6%
Drinking parties	Student frequently attends drinking parties where peers drink.	13.7%	7.1%	49.0%	40.4%
Stress	Student feels under stress or pressure "most" or "all" of the time.	19.8%	11.9%	29.3%	21.8%
Physical abuse	Student reports at least one incident of physical abuse by an adult.	22.6%	11.6%	25.4%	14.1%
Sexual abuse	Student reports at least one incident of sexual abuse.	12.2%	5.7%	16.7%	9.0%
Parental addiction	Student reports a parent "has a serious problem with alcohol or drugs."	10.5%	4.1%	13.6%	5.3%
Social isolation	Student feels a consistent lack of care, support, and understanding.	66.1%	53.2%	69.3%	56.3%
Negative peer influence	Most close friends are involved in chemical use and/or are in frequent trouble at school.	2.0%	0.9%	4.3%	2.3%

■ FIGURE 5

ASSET DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SINGLE- AND TWO-PARENT YOUTH

This chart compares the percentages of youth in single-parent and two-parent families who experience each asset.

EXTERNAL ASSETS

Asset Type	Asset Name	Asset Definition	Grades 6-8		Grades 9-12	
			One Parent	Two Parents	One Parent	Two Parents
SUPPORT	Family support	Family life provides high levels of love and support.	54.3%	69.8%	44.2%	55.4%
	Parent as social resource	Student views parent(s) as accessible resources for advice and support.	48.9%	51.4%	43.8%	42.5%
	Parent communication	Student has frequent, in-depth conversations with parent(s).	43.1%	45.0%	47.1%	52.8%
	Other adult resources	Student has access to non-parent adults for advice and support.	45.3%	49.2%	48.1%	48.9%
	Other adult communication	Student has frequent, in-depth conversations with non-parent adults.	33.1%	31.7%	48.3%	47.2%
	Parent involvement in schooling	Parent(s) are involved in helping student succeed in school.	29.8%	38.1%	14.7%	23.0%
	Positive school climate	School provides a caring, encouraging environment.	32.3%	37.0%	24.6%	28.4%
CONTROL	Parental standards	Parent(s) have standards for appropriate conduct.	79.8%	87.2%	59.2%	73.7%
	Parental discipline	Parent(s) discipline student when a rule is violated.	57.7%	64.5%	48.5%	59.7%
	Parental monitoring	Parent(s) monitor "where I am going and with whom I will be."	69.6%	75.1%	72.3%	81.9%
	Time at home	Student goes out for "fun and recreation" three or fewer nights per week.	65.0%	72.8%	64.4%	71.9%
	Positive peer influence	Student's best friends model responsible behavior.	28.6%	35.3%	25.1%	30.6%
STRUCTURED TIME USE	Music	Student spends at least one hour a week in music training or practice.	23.0%	34.0%	19.2%	28.2%
	School extracurricular activities	Student spends at least one hour a week in school sports, clubs, or organizations.	52.3%	66.0%	51.9%	66.3%
	Community organizations or activities	Student spends at least one hour a week in organizations or clubs outside school.	37.3%	43.9%	31.7%	40.6%
	Church or synagogue involvement	Student spends at least one hour a week attending religious programs or services.	51.9%	68.0%	39.8%	59.2%

(CHART CONTINUES ON PAGE 20)

■ FIGURE 5 (CONTINUED)

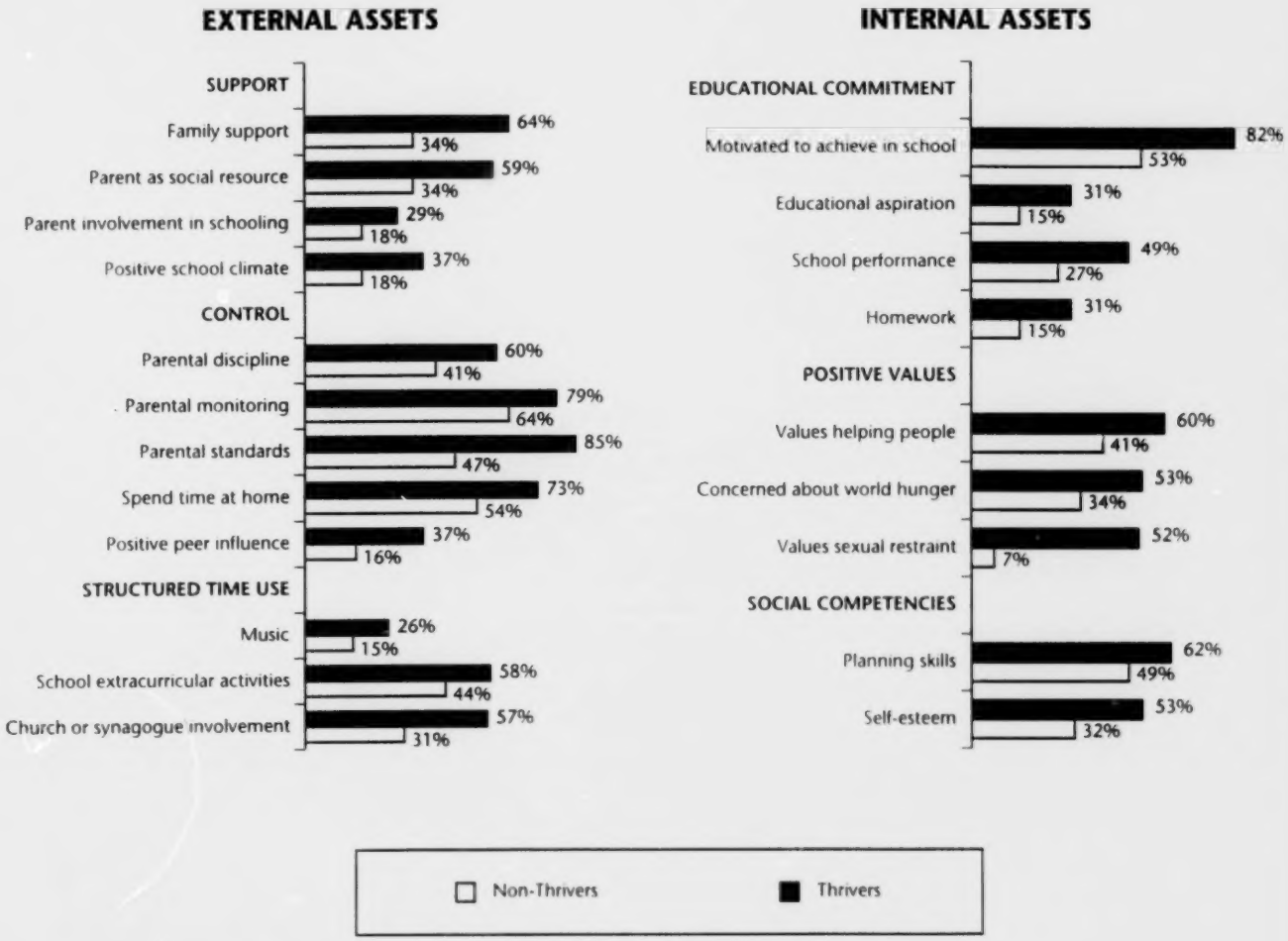
INTERNAL ASSETS

Asset Type	Asset Name	Asset Definition	Grades 6-8 One Parent	Grades 6-8 Two Parents	Grades 9-12 One Parent	Grades 9-12 Two Parents
EDUCATIONAL COMMITMENT	Achievement motivation	Student is motivated to do well in school.	71.9%	78.7%	65.9%	70.1%
	Educational aspiration	Student aspires to pursue post-high school education.	79.1%	86.3%	83.3%	88.8%
	School performance	Student reports school performance is above average.	37.0%	50.1%	37.2%	48.7%
	Homework	Student reports at least six hours of homework per week.	23.3%	26.6%	22.9%	28.4%
POSITIVE VALUES	Values helping people	Student places high personal value on helping other people.	59.9%	56.8%	46.8%	41.2%
	Concerned about world hunger	Student reports interest in helping to reduce world hunger.	48.9%	46.7%	42.1%	40.1%
	Cares about other people's feelings	Student cares about other people's feelings.	84.7%	86.2%	87.8%	89.2%
	Valuing sexual restraint	Student values postponing sexual activity.	41.5%	54.0%	19.8%	30.6%
SOCIAL COMPETENCIES	Assertiveness skills	Student reports ability to "stand up for what I believe."	79.3%	81.0%	83.9%	82.9%
	Decision-making skills	Student reports "I am good at making decisions."	61.9%	67.6%	67.8%	69.6%
	Friendship-making skills	Student reports "I am good at making friends."	70.8%	73.5%	74.4%	75.5%
	Planning skills	Student reports "I am good at planning ahead."	54.4%	59.2%	55.2%	57.1%
	Self-esteem	Student reports high self-esteem.	40.6%	50.0%	41.5%	45.1%
	Positive view of personal future	Student is optimistic about his/her personal future.	63.1%	70.1%	65.4%	68.9%

■ FIGURE 6

PROMOTING RESILIENCY IN SINGLE-PARENT YOUTH

This chart compares the percentages of 6th-12th grade youth in single-parent families who thrive versus those who experience problems by whether they have 20 selected assets in their lives. "Thrivers" are those youth in single-parent families who are involved in none or one of 20 at-risk behaviors; "non-thrivers" are those in single-parent families who are involved in five or more of these behaviors.



*For a definition of each asset, see Figure 5.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Peter L. Benson is president of Search Institute and serves as principal investigator on numerous studies of adolescents. Eugene C. Roehlkepartain is Search Institute's director of the programs and services division. He serves as editor of Search Institute publications.

Search INSTITUTE
Thresher Square West
Suite 210
700 South Third Street
Minneapolis, MN
55415